



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: Feb. 27, 2001 (01-06)  
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## **Foot-and-mouth disease may travel from Britain to the U.S. with unsuspecting tourists**

OLYMPIA — Dr. Robert Mead, state veterinarian, warned today that anyone who has been to the United Kingdom during the last 30 days should stay away from farms, ranches and zoos. An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease – a highly communicable viral disease of cattle and swine – has been reported in England and Scotland. Although humans are not susceptible to the disease, they can serve as carriers.

Hedgehogs, rats, sheep, goats, deer, cattle, swine and other cloven-hoofed mammals are susceptible. Meat, fresh milk or other animal products from the United Kingdom could be contaminated and should not be discarded where these animals could consume it.

"These are precautionary measures," said Mead. Officials in Great Britain are scrambling to contain the disease, which can be spread by the wind, on the wheels of vehicles and on human clothing. The disease is spreading in Great Britain despite a weeklong ban on animal movements.

Foot-and-mouth disease is characterized by fever and blister-like sores on the tongue and lips, in the mouth, on the teats and between the hooves. The disease can be confused with several other animal illnesses. Whenever blisters or other typical signs are observed, laboratory tests must be completed to confirm the disease. Many animals affected by foot-and-mouth disease recover, but it leaves them debilitated. It causes severe losses in the production of meat and milk.

Animals, people or materials can spread foot-and-mouth disease. An outbreak can occur when:

- People wearing contaminated clothes or footwear, or using contaminated equipment, pass the virus to susceptible animals.
- Animals carrying the virus are introduced into susceptible herds.
- Contaminated facilities are used to hold susceptible animals.
- Contaminated vehicles are used to move susceptible animals.
- Raw or improperly cooked garbage containing infected meat or animal products is fed to susceptible animals.

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- Susceptible animals are exposed to materials such as hay, feed, hides or biologics contaminated with the virus.
- Susceptible animals drink contaminated water.
- A susceptible cow is inseminated with semen from an infected bull.

"Foot-and-mouth disease is one of the most dreaded livestock illnesses," said Mead. "U.S. animals are highly susceptible. If an outbreak occurred, the virus could spread rapidly to all parts of the country through routine livestock movements unless detected early and eradicated immediately. If spread unchecked, losses could reach billions of dollars in the first year. Deer and wildlife could become infected rapidly and remain a reservoir for the virus."

In Great Britain, officials said 28 swine showed symptoms of the disease Feb. 19 at a slaughter plant. The disease was confirmed at the slaughterhouse and premises in Essex outside of London Feb. 20. Several thousand swine, sheep and cattle have been destroyed thus far in the outbreak. As of today, there are 16 confirmed cases.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture already prohibits the importation of susceptible animals and animal products from Europe because of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) otherwise known as "Mad Cow Disease." The U.S. military has been notified of the potential for indirect introduction through movements of military equipment and personnel from foot-and-mouth infected countries.

The U.S. has been free of foot-and-mouth disease since 1929, when the last of nine outbreaks was eradicated. The last outbreak in Washington was in 1914.

Owners, producers and veterinarians are to call the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1878 or the USDA area office at (360) 753-9430 to immediately report any unusual or suspicious signs of disease.

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